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Commissioner

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Enclosure 4b
April 19, 2012

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TO: Members of the Board of Regents

FROM: Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner

RE: Renewal of the Blackstone Academy Charter by the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

The charter of the Blackstone Academy expires at the conclusion of the 2011-12 school year. In accordance with the Board of Regents Regulations Governing Public Charter Schools C-4-3, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) coordinated the process of evaluating Blackstone Academy's performance over the past five years to determine the merits of charter renewal.

Review Process

- Over the past two years, RIDE has developed a rigorous evaluation of charter school performance, guided by three questions:
 - Is the school's educational program an academic success?
 - Is the school providing the appropriate conditions for academic success?
 - Is the school a viable organization?

Because the review was not complete at the time of analysis, Blackstone Academy went through a targeted version of the full review.

The first portion of the review — is the school's educational program an academic success? — was designed to consider all relevant student outcome measures, including mathematics and ELA NECAP performance, IDEA SPP indicators, graduation rates, federal Adequate Yearly Progress designations, and, if applicable, ACCESS proficiency and graduation rates.

The second portion of the review – is the school providing the appropriate conditions for success? – was designed to gauge the quality of instructional leadership, instruction, and curriculum (mathematics and ELA only) at each school relative to the standards set forth in the Board of Regents Basic Education Program. Evidence for this portion of the review was gathered through a two-day site visit and, where applicable, the findings of 2010 Commissioner’s Review Process.

The third portion of the review – is the school a viable organization? – was designed to consider whether or not schools are using public funds responsibly and appropriately. RIDE staff reviewed each school’s financial audits over the course of the charter term, as well as other relevant documentation on the school’s compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.

- The school was required to complete a renewal application. This application provides an opportunity: (1) to present any important new or supplemental information pertaining to the above guiding questions, to enable a more comprehensive assessment of school performance; and (2) to articulate the school’s strategies and capacities for sustaining success and continuing to improve over the next charter term.

Key Findings

- The educational program at Blackstone Academy is on a trajectory of growth and improvement. As measured by NECAP, the school’s ELA program is strong as compared to its sending districts and similar schools statewide throughout the most recent charter term. In the last two school years, the school’s mathematics program has improved significantly as measured by NECAP. The school grew from single-digit mathematics proficiency in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 teaching years to outpacing its sending districts and similar schools statewide [See Attachment 1]. This improvement has put the school over the threshold for meeting AYP in the last two school years.
- Blackstone Academy is providing many of the key appropriate conditions for success. Our review indicates that the school has many of the internal systems and structures to measurably improve the achievement of its students:
 - The school’s leadership has developed a clear instructional strategy that was, during the team’s visit, consistently implemented as observed. According to its renewal application, the school plans to address this through professional development for teachers.
 - The school’s Board of Directors’ involvement in terms of setting the vision for the school’s educational program and holding the principal accountable was limited at the time of review. According to its renewal

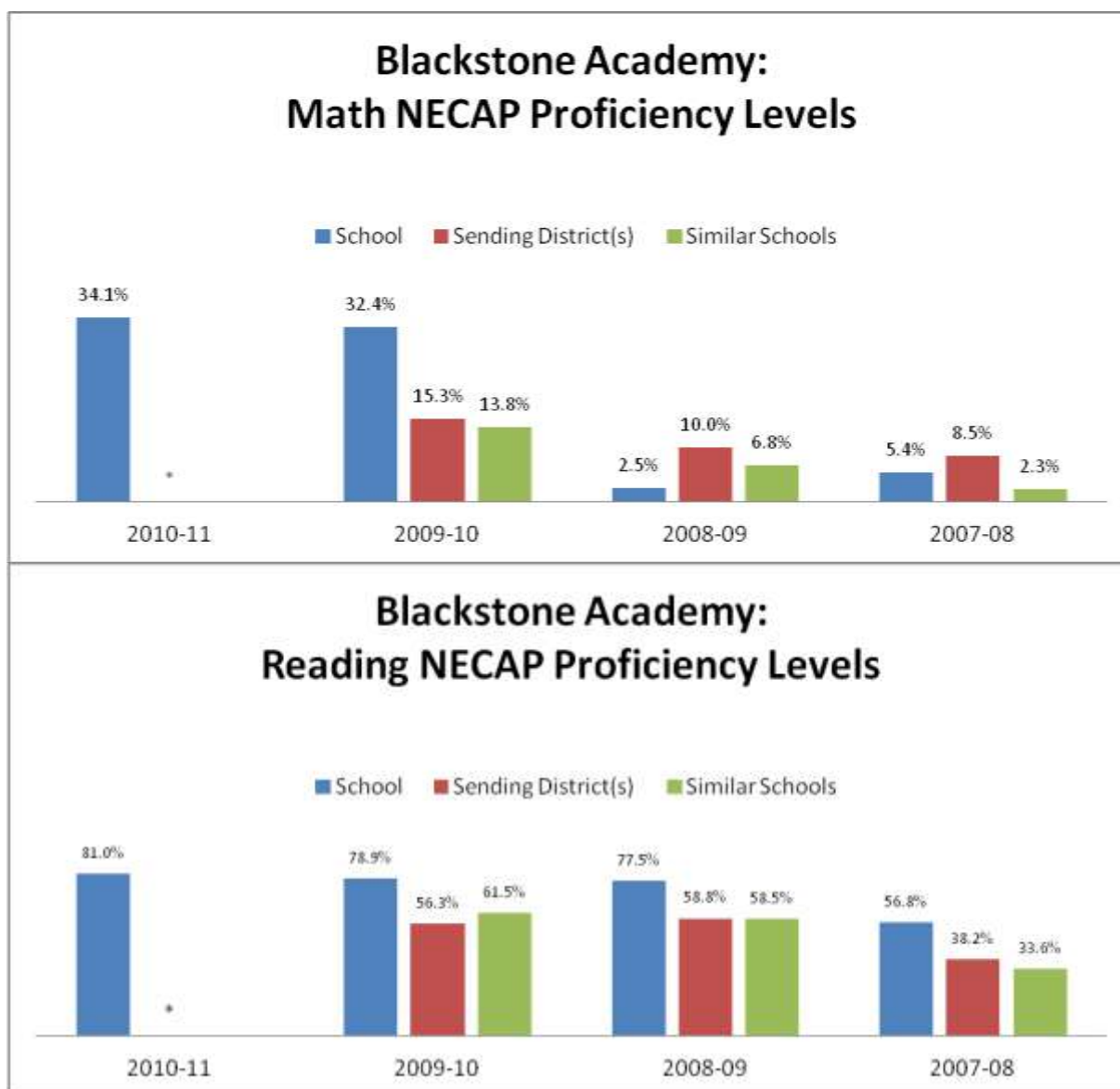
application, the board will bolster its leadership role by developing a formal evaluation process for its school leaders and a comprehensive strategic plan.

- For the financial review, RIDE reviewed audit history for the charter term. Blackstone Academy has received unqualified opinions on all of its audits in the most recent charter term and is materially compliant with applicable statutory and regulatory obligations.

THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education renew the charter of Blackstone Academy for a five (5) year term, to operate in accordance with the renewed Charter from the 2012-13 school year to the 2016-17 school year. To be eligible for future charter renewal, the school must demonstrate overall success by:

- **attaining student achievement goals as defined by the Charter Performance Review Handbook. And,**
- **demonstrating the management and leadership necessary to establish a thriving, financially viable charter public school as defined by the organizational performance goals in the Charter Performance Review Handbook. And,**
- **ensuring that all operational elements of the school meet statutory and regulatory guidelines.**

Attachment 1:



School = Blackstone Academy Proficiency Levels

Sending District = A weighted average of a school's sending district(s)' proficiency levels. Blackstone Academy draws 55% of its students from Pawtucket and 45% from Central Falls.

Similar Schools = An estimate of the proficiency level of Rhode Island schools with similar numbers of ELL, SPED, and FRPL students as Blackstone Academy.

* Comparative data is not yet available for the 2010-11 teaching year.

Student Performance Relative to Sending District and Similar Schools

| BLACKSTONE ACADEMY | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | | 2006-2007 TcY | 2007-2008 TcY | 2008-2009 TcY | 2009-2010 TcY | 2010-2011 TcY |
| Proficiency Level | Reading | N/A | 56.80% | 77.50% | 79.00% | 81.00% |
| | Math | N/A | 5.80% | 2.50% | 32.00% | 34.00% |
| | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Sending District | Reading | N/A | Above Typical | Above Typical | Above Typical | N/A |
| | Math | N/A | Below Typical | Below Typical | Above Typical | N/A |
| 1.2 Similar Schools | Reading | N/A | Above Typical | Above Typical | Above Typical | N/A |
| | Math | N/A | Typical | Typical | Above Typical | N/A |
| 1.5 AYP | | N/A | Insufficient Progress | Caution | Met | N/A |